

# RHETORICAL QUESTIONS IN PAPUAN MALAY, OTHER MALAYIC LANGUAGES, & THE PAPUAN LANGUAGES OF WEST PAPUA

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## Abstract

This paper presents a descriptive and typological study of rhetorical questions. The first part describes the form and functions of rhetorical questions in Papuan Malay. There are no formal characteristics that mark Papuan Malay rhetorical questions. Instead, the context indicates whether a question has rhetorical functions. Typically, Papuan Malay rhetorical questions have social functions as pseudo questions, while their discourse-stimulating uses as stimulus questions are marginal. Pseudo questions are used to convey assertions, expressions of incertitude and negative evaluations. The speakers' underlying emotions tend to be negative. The second part of this paper investigates typological aspects of rhetorical questions in Malayic languages, as well as other Austronesian and Papuan languages in West Papua. Three patterns emerge which are submitted as testable hypotheses for further studies on rhetorical questions: (1) rhetorical questions tend to have social functions; (2) speakers do not use them to convey positive evaluations; and (3) rhetorical questions tend to carry underlying negative emotions. For Papuan Malay, at least, all three patterns apply.

**Keywords:** Papuan Malay, rhetorical questions, pseudo questions, discourse-stimulating questions, Austronesian languages

**ISO 639-3 codes:** abs, ahh, auu, ayz, bpq, dni, dnw, eip, eng, had, inb, jax, kbv, kcd, kgr, khe, lrt, max, mej, mkn, mtd, mtg, mti, nbq, nir, pmy, skv, tyn, wms, wno, xmm, yac, zsm

## 1 Introduction

This paper discussed rhetorical questions from a descriptive and a typological perspective.<sup>1</sup> The first part discusses the form and functions of rhetorical questions in Papuan Malay, as spoken along West Papua's north-east coast, on the island of New Guinea. The second part examines typological aspects of rhetorical questions in different Malay and Malayic languages, as well as other Austronesian and Papuan<sup>2</sup> languages in West Papua, based on. The main focus of this typological research is to examine to what extent the form and functions of rhetorical questions in Papuan Malay are typical cross-linguistically, based on the findings of a cross-linguistic literature study.

Papuan Malay is an eastern Malay language; the ISO code is [pmy]. The language is spoken in coastal West Papua, where it is the language of wider communication and the first or second language for an ever-increasing number of people of the area (1,100,000 to 1,200,000 speakers).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The term "Papuan" is a collective label used for "the non-Austronesian languages spoken in New Guinea and archipelagos to the West and East"; the term "does not refer to a superordinate category to which all the languages belong" (Klamer et al. 2008: 107).

<sup>3</sup> This conservative population estimate is based on Kluge's (2017: 37–39) assessment.

This section provides an introduction to this descriptive and typological study of rhetorical questions. In §1.1, key aspects of rhetorical questions are explored, namely their typical functions and emotive meanings. The identification of rhetorical questions is discussed in §1.2, followed in §1.3 by a description of the methodological approach chosen for the present study. Following these introductory remarks, the first part of this paper discusses the form and functions of rhetorical questions in Papuan Malay. More specifically, their syntactic and phonological features are investigated in §2. This analysis is followed, in §3, by a description of their pragmatic uses in spoken discourse, with pseudo questions being examined in §3.1, while stimulus questions are discussed in §3.2. The findings of this analysis are quantified in §4 to explore speaker preferences in their uses of rhetorical questions in Papuan Malay. The second part of this paper presents, in §5, the findings of the typological study on rhetorical questions and examines to what extent the form and functions of rhetorical questions in Papuan Malay are typical cross-linguistically. The findings of this research on rhetorical questions are summarized in §6.

### **1.1 Key aspects of rhetorical questions**

Rhetorical questions are very common utterances that have the grammatical form of questions to which the addressees are not expected to provide an answer. That is, the speakers do not employ them “to request information or to invite a reply” (Abrams and Harpham 2009: 315). Instead, the question format enables the speakers to declare an expectation or point of view over other possible ones without having to discuss them, to intensify or strengthen a statement, or to raise an issue for discussion (Bussmann 1996: 1009). Due to this multifunctionality of having the grammatical form of a question but the illocutionary force of a statement, rhetorical questions “are an indirect way to imply more than is said” (Frank 1990: 737; see also Borge 2013: 415). The addressees, for their part, know that they are not expected to provide an answer but are rather expected to recognize and infer the implicit rhetorical answer “as an obligatory mental response” (Ilie 1994: 84, 102).

While, as Schmidt-Radefeldt (1977: 377–378) points out, there is general agreement that “rhetorical questions are intended to provide information [...] and] that the speaker does not expect an answer from the other dialogue partner”, more in-depth categorizations have been controversial. Along similar lines, Fahnestock (2009: 198) maintains, that there is in “the classical and early modern rhetorical manuals [...] no single category of rhetorical question. Instead, many devices involve the syntactic and prosodic forms of questioning”.

The present study adopts Hackstein’s (2004) basic dichotomy of rhetorical questions in analyzing their functions in Papuan Malay. This dichotomy distinguishes between rhetorical questions to which the answer is implied by the question and rhetorical questions to which the answer is not implied (2004: 167–168). Hackstein refers to the former as pseudo questions and to the latter as stimulus questions.

The first type of rhetorical questions is “pseudo questions” in that the answer to such a question “is obvious and implicit in the question itself” and, therefore, “not made explicit by the speaker” (2004: 167). Pseudo questions have social functions. In English, for instance, some of the social functions of rhetorical questions are to convey commands or suggestions, to express assertions, to signal evaluations, to convey admonishments, exhortations, or rebukes, to signal incertitude, such as doubt or uncertainty, or to communicate surprise, as shown in the following examples (Larson 1998: 258–260; see also Quirk et al. 1985: 825–826):

- Command: “When are you going to empty the garbage?”
- Suggestion: “Why don’t you wash the dishes?”
- Assertion: “How can I pass you, if you don’t turn in your assignments?”
- Evaluation: “Why did you come?”
- Rebuke: “Why are you always bothering grandfather?”
- Incertitude: “What are we going to eat?”
- Surprise: “Are they here so soon?”

Providing an indirect way to communicate more than is actually said (Frank 1990: 737), pseudo questions enable speakers, for instance, to strengthen their statements as is the case with the above example, “How can I pass you, if you don’t turn in your assignments?”. This question has the social function of a strong negative assertion: “I can’t pass you, if you don’t ...!”. Along similar lines, pseudo questions allow speakers to soften criticism and thereby to minimize potential face-threats, as with the above example, “Why don’t you wash the

dishes?”. Functioning as a friendly suggestion, this pseudo question comes across considerably less forceful than the corresponding imperative form, “Wash the dishes!”.

Rather typically, pseudo questions also carry emotive meanings. In addition to conveying a range of different social functions, they tend to be accompanied by “a wide range of emotional attitudes on the part of the speaker”, such as feelings of anger, apprehension, frustration, impatience, amazement, perplexity, or surprise (Beekman and Callow 1974: 243; see also Schmidt-Radefeldt 1977: 389; Larson 1979; 1998: 258–260).

An English example, presented by Larson (1998: 258), would be a parent asking his/her child, “When are you going to empty the garbage?”. As the child knows that this chore is his/her duty but refuses to do so, the parent is angry about the child’s refusal. To communicate both the command and the underlying emotions, the parent may choose to use the above question. Having the grammatical form of a content question asking about time, “When ...?”, its illocutionary force is that of a command (“Empty the garbage!”). Moreover, this command is emotionally charged in that it conveys the parent’s emotional attitude toward the child, namely feelings of anger and frustration.

In summary, pseudo questions “achieve a greater expressive force” than is possible with direct statements (Abrams and Harpham 2009: 315). Furthermore, according to Frank (1990: 738), their multifunctionality enables “people to win an argument (short term), while not jeopardising a relationship (long term)”.

The second type of rhetorical questions are “stimulus questions” (Hackstein 2004: 167). The answer to a such question “is not implied by the question” but provided by the speaker him-/herself “to announce an explanation or a clarification, with the intention of arousing the attention of the addressee and appealing to the addressee’s intellect to be attentive, understanding, and recollective of the answer” (2004: 167–168; see also Beekman and Callow 1974: 245; Larson 1998: 260, 449). Given that this type of rhetorical questions has discourse-stimulating rather than social functions, Hackstein proposes the term stimulus question.<sup>4</sup> An English example would be the stimulus question, “Why is there so much unemployment these days?”. Having presented the question to his/her interlocutors, the speaker does not wait for an answer, but begins to talk about the reasons for unemployment (see also Larson 1998: 260).

## 1.2 Identification of rhetorical questions

The above description, definitions, and examples suggest that the identification of a question as a rhetorical question and its uses as a pseudo or a stimulus questions are more or less straightforward. Analyzing excerpts from three different sets of naturalistic, conversational data, however, Frank (1990) comes to the conclusion that this is not the case. While the use of rhetorical questions as “effective persuasive device” is widely recognized and while most speakers can recognize and produce examples of such questions, rhetorical questions “may be as difficult to define as they are strategically effective” (1990: 723).

One reason is that is impossible to know with certainty the speakers’ thinking, attitudes and underlying communicative intent and to interpret their communicative acts from their point of view. Hence, the identification of an utterance as a rhetorical question relies on the “analysts’ subjective judgments regarding speakers’ true intent, something which can’t be ascertained on the basis of form alone” (Frank 1990: 729, 737). Secondly, it is mostly the addressees’ responses, or “the communicative effect” brought about by the speakers’ utterances, that enable the identification of rhetorical questions. This effect is negotiable, however, given that both the speaker and the addressee cooperate “in creating total meaning” (1990: 737). A third reason is that the “‘context’ may be the most salient determiner of frequency and function” of rhetorical questions (1990: 737). The above-mentioned difficulties not only apply to the identification of rhetorical questions per se. They also apply when it comes to identifying speakers’ underlying emotional attitudes.

Frank (1990: 729–730) concludes therefore that, “as a non-participant observer”, the analyst “can only make ‘best guesses’ regarding intent and effect”. Having collected additional information pertinent to the context, the analyst might use his/her intuition, and prior experience as participant in similar situations”, to interpret speakers’ utterances in terms of their intent and underlying emotions.

<sup>4</sup> Given that this type of rhetorical questions introduces a clarification, Hackstein (2004: 168) also proposes the alternative term “epexegetic questions” for this type of rhetorical questions.

### 1.3 Methodological approach

The present study employs a methodological approach to the analysis of rhetorical questions that is similar to the one suggested by Frank (1990). It is based on a 16-hour corpus of narratives and spontaneous conversations between Papuan Malay speakers, recorded by the author during her three-month stay in a Papuan household, together with quite a few of the recorded Papuan Malay interlocutors. Having been present during the recorded conversations as a participant observer, the author was able to collect additional information pertinent to the context. Based on this information, as well as her experiences as a participant observer in a Papuan household, and her intuition, the author examined the recordings and transcriptions of the 16-hour corpus. Taking into account the semantic content of the recordings, their setting, the tone of the speakers' voices, as well as other, nonverbal phenomena, such as laughter, the author identified 231 utterances which she interpreted as rhetorical questions, and more specifically, as pseudo or stimulus questions. The mentioned textual and audio features were also taken as indications of the speakers' underlying emotions.

Hence, the descriptive part of the present study on rhetorical questions in Papuan Malay is based on an outsider's perspective rather than on the intuitions of and corroboration by Papuan speakers of Papuan Malay. Yet, given the large amount of recorded data taken together with her own experiences as a participant observer, the author submits that the results of her, admittedly, subjective analysis are still of value. As discussed below in detail, the results suggest a number of patterns which are corroborated by the findings of a typological study. This typological part of the present study of rhetorical questions involves an extensive cross-linguistic literature study on different Malay and Malayic languages, as well as other Austronesian and Papuan languages in West Papua. This study is based on the references given for each of these languages in the *Glottolog 3.1* (Nordhoff et al. 2017). The inquiry was carried out in several steps with a widening scope regarding the genetic affiliations and geographical locations of the investigated languages.

## 2 Syntactic and phonological features of Papuan Malay rhetorical questions

In Papuan Malay, there are no formal, linguistic signals, neither syntactic nor phonological ones, to differentiate rhetorical questions from "real", non-rhetorical questions asking for information. Likewise, there are no signals that assist in distinguishing rhetorical polar and alternative questions from non-rhetorical ones. The best indication for differentiating rhetorical questions from non-rhetorical ones is the context in which the questions occur by observing the pragmatic function a particular question has in the discourse.

The matching syntax and intonation patterns of non-rhetorical and rhetorical content questions are examined in §2.1, while those of polar and alternative questions are discussed in §2.2.

### 2.1 Non-rhetorical and rhetorical content questions

Papuan Malay rhetorical questions have the same syntax and intonation patterns as non-rhetorical questions eliciting new information. The interrogatives are not an exclusive set but are used interchangeably between non-rhetorical and rhetorical content questions.

More specifically, the language has six interrogatives which serve to form content questions and elicit new information: *siapa* 'who', *apa* 'what', *mana* 'where, which', *bagemana* 'how', *kapang* 'when', and *knapa* 'why'. All of them are used pronominally. Most of them also have predicative uses; the exception is *kapang* 'when'. In addition, *siapa* 'who', *apa* 'what', and *mana* 'where, which' also have adnominal uses. In their pronominal and adnominal uses, the interrogatives typically remain *in-situ*, that is, in the position of the constituents they replace. Furthermore, all but one of the interrogatives have predicative uses; the exception is *kapang* 'when'. In addition, the mid-range quantifier *brapa* 'several' also functions as an interrogative, questioning quantities in the sense of 'how many'. (For a detailed discussion of the Papuan Malay interrogatives, see Kluge 2017: 287–301.)

In their pronominal uses, *siapa* 'who' and *apa* 'what' can occur in all syntactic positions. Verbal clauses with *siapa* 'who' or *apa* 'what' in the subject slot are dispreferred, however.<sup>5</sup> Instead, speakers typically use equative nominal clauses when they want to question the identity of the clausal subject. In such clauses, *siapa* 'who' or *apa* 'what' take the subject slot while a headless relative clause takes the predicate slot. This is illustrated with the equative interrogative clause in (1), where *siapa* 'who' is the subject, while the headless relative clause *yang mo ...* '(the one who) will ...' is the predicate. In the content question in (2), the

<sup>5</sup> The Papuan Malay corpus includes only few questions with *siapa* 'who' in the subject slot, while content questions with *apa* 'what' in the subject slot are unattested (Kluge 2017: 289, 291).

interrogative *apa* ‘what’ takes the clause-final object slot. Both interrogative clauses have the clause-final rising intonation, typical of interrogatives. The intonation is marked with “—” dashes above the transcription indicating pitch height and/or pitch direction. In addition, the respective clause-initial lexemes *siapa* ‘who’ and *kam* ‘2PL’ are marked with a pronounced increase in pitch, indicated with “’”.<sup>6</sup>

The same syntax and intonation patterns apply to rhetorical questions formed with pronominally used *siapa* ‘who’ and *apa* ‘what’, as illustrated in (3) and (4). Both clauses have the same clause-final rising intonation. Likewise, the respective clause-initial lexemes are marked with the pronounced increase in pitch.

### Pronominal uses of *siapa* ‘who’ or *apa* ‘what’

- (1) — — — — —  
*mama, siápa yang mo brangkat?*  
 mother who REL want leave

Content question: ‘Madam, **who (is the one who)** wants to leave?’

- (2) — — — — —  
*kám cári ápa?*  
 2PL search what

Content question: ‘**what** are you looking for?’

- (3) — — — — — — — — — — —  
*... sakit siápa yang mo tólong ambil káyu?*  
 be.sick who REL want help fetch wood

Rhetorical question: [About child-less old people:] ‘... (when they are) sick **who (is the one who)** will help (them and) fetch (fire)wood?’

- (4) — — — — — — — — — — —  
*... kó mó baca ápa?*  
 2SG want sleep what

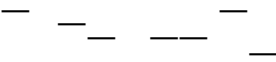
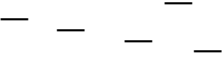
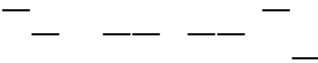
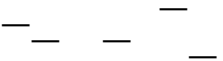
Rhetorical question: ‘[if you don’t go to school,] **what** do you want to read?’

The content questions in (5) and (7) are formed with the pronominally used interrogatives *mana* ‘where, which’ and *kapang* ‘when’, respectively. As in the interrogative clauses formed with *siapa* ‘who’ in (1) and *apa* ‘what’ in (2), the interrogative clauses in (5) and (7) have the typical clause-final rising intonation. In addition, the respective clause initial lexemes *ko* ‘2SG’ and *kapang* ‘when’ are marked with the pronounced increase in pitch.

Again, the same syntax and intonation patterns apply to rhetorical questions formed with pronominally used *mana* ‘where, which’ and *kapang* ‘when’, as demonstrated in (6) and (8), respectively. Both clauses have the typical clause-final rising intonation as well as the clause-initial pronounced increase in pitch.

<sup>6</sup> The phonetic realization of *siapa* ‘who’ is disyllabic [s’a.pa], with the stressed penultimate syllable receiving the additional increase in pitch.

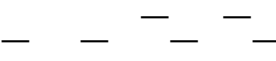
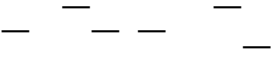
### Pronominal uses of *mana* ‘where, which’ and *kapang* ‘when’

- (5)   
*kó dátang dari mána?*  
 2SG come from where  
 ‘from **where** do you come?’
- (6)   
*yo, minta ijing, kó mó ke mána?*  
 yes request permission 2SG want to where  
 ‘yes, ask for a leave of absence (from school), **where** do you want to go?’
- (7)   
*kápang kitong antar dia?*  
 when 1PL bring 3SG  
 [Discussing when the bride’s parents should bring their daughter to the groom’s parents:] ‘**when** do we bring her?’
- (8)   
*kápang ko blá?*  
 when 2SG split  
 [Replying to her boasting cousin:] ‘**when** did you split (fire)wood?’

### 2.2 Non-rhetorical and rhetorical polar and alternative questions

Syntactically, non-rhetorical polar questions in Papuan Malay have the same structure as the corresponding declarative clauses. The only distinction between both clause types is that polar questions are marked with the clause-final rising intonation, typical of interrogatives, as in (9) (see also Kluge 2017: 524–528). In their rhetorical uses, polar questions have the same intonation pattern, as shown in (10).

#### Non-rhetorical and rhetorical polar questions

- (9)   
*trek de isi minyak?*  
 truck 3SG fill oil  
 ‘does the truck load gasoline?’ (Lit. ‘the truck loads gasoline?’)
- (10)   
*ko sája yang skóla?*  
 2SG just REL go.to.school  
 [After having been insulted by a fellow student:] ‘(do you think that) you’re the only one who goes school?’

Alternative questions are formed with the alternative-marking conjunction *ka* ‘or’ (see also Kluge 2017: 528–529). Again, they are marked with the typical clause-final rising intonation. In addition, the lexeme preceding *ka* ‘or’ is marked with a pronounced increase in pitch of its stressed penultimate syllable, as

illustrated in (11). In their rhetorical uses, alternative questions marked with *ka* ‘or’ have the same intonation pattern, as demonstrated in (12).

### Non-rhetorical and rhetorical alternative questions

- (11)     —   —       —   —  
mo   cabut   ítu   **ka?**  
want pull.out D.DIST or  
‘do you want to pull that (one) out **or (not)?**’

- (12)     —       —   —  
ko   gíla   **ka?**  
2SG be.crazy or  
‘are you crazy **or (not)?**’

## 3 Pragmatic uses of Papuan Malay rhetorical questions

In Papuan Malay, two basic types of rhetorical questions can be distinguished, namely questions that serve social functions and questions that have discourse-stimulating functions. As mentioned, the former are “pseudo questions”, while the latter are “stimulus questions” (Hackstein 2004: 167–168). Pseudo questions are examined in §3.1, while stimulus questions are discussed in §3.2.

### 3.1 Pseudo questions and their social functions

A first basic type of rhetorical questions are pseudo questions; they fulfill social functions. In Papuan Malay, speakers employ pseudo questions to express negative and positive assertions (see §3.1.2), to convey negative evaluations (see §3.1.3), or to communicate statements of incertitude (see §3.1.4). Rather typically, these questions are accompanied by emotional undertones. Before exploring the functions of pseudo questions in detail in §3.1.2 to §3.1.4, respectively, the different question and polarity types across these functions are discussed in §3.1.1.

#### 3.1.1 Question and polarity types across functions

In Papuan Malay, the different social functions of pseudo questions are realized as polar questions or as content questions. Polar questions may have matched or unmatched polarity, whereas content questions have either neutral polarity or unmatched polarity.<sup>7</sup> More specifically, the notion of matched or unmatched polarity refers to the polarity match between the actual grammatical form of a rhetorical question and its intended meaning. An English example for a rhetorical question with matched polarity would be the question, “Didn’t you listen to ...?”. The grammatical form of this question is negative, and the intended meaning is also negative, intensifying the speaker’s intended meaning and adding admonishment: “You didn’t listen to ...!”. An English example for a rhetorical question with unmatched polarity would be the question, “You are not cheating?”. The grammatical form of the question is again negative, but the intended meaning is positive, challenging the assertion of the interlocutor that he/she is not cheating: “You are cheating!”. (For more examples see Table 1; see also Koshik 1999: 2; Quirk et al. 1985: 808.)

In Papuan Malay, pseudo questions expressing assertions are realized as polar questions with matched or unmatched polarity or as content questions with unmatched polarity. Negative evaluations are realized as content questions proper with neutral polarity. Statements of incertitude are typically realized as content questions proper with neutral polarity; less frequently they are expressed as polar questions with matched polarity.

An overview of the question and polarity types across the different social functions of Papuan Malay pseudo questions is given in Table 1, together with an English example for each type and function.

<sup>7</sup> Neutral polarity refers to questions that have “no bias for eliciting a positive or negative response” (Quirk et al. 1985: 808).

Table 1: English examples of pseudo question and polarity types across functions

| Types                                   | Functions   |   |
|---|---|---|
|   | Assertion (positive)  | Assertion (negative)  |
| Polar question:<br>matched polarity     | Grammatically affirmative:<br>“Are you cheating?”<br>(≈ “You are cheating!”)                            | Grammatically negative:<br>“Didn’t you listen to ...?”<br>(≈ “You didn’t listen to ...!”) |
| Polar question:<br>unmatched polarity   | Grammatically negative:<br>“You are not cheating?”<br>(≈ “You are cheating!”)                           | Grammatically affirmative:<br>“Did you listen to ...?”<br>(≈ “You didn’t listen to ...!”) |
| Content question:<br>unmatched polarity | Grammatically affirmative:<br>“Who told you ...?”<br>(≈ “No one told you ...!”)                         | Grammatically neg.:<br>“Who wouldn’t know ...?”<br>(≈ “Everyone knows ...!”)              |
|   | Evaluation (negative)   |   |
| Content question proper                 | “Why did you follow me?”<br>(≈ “You shouldn’t have followed me!”)                                       |   |
|   | Statement of incertitude  |   |
| Content question proper                 | “When will we meet again?”<br>(≈ “I don’t know when we’ll meet again!”)                                 |   |
| Polar question:<br>matched polarity     | “You’ve already finished the meeting?”<br>(≈ “I’m perplexed that you’ve already finished the meeting!”) |   |

As for assertions realized as polar questions with variously matched or unmatched polarity, the questions can be “grammatically affirmative” or “negative” (Koshik 1999: 9-10).

In the case of polar questions with matched polarity, addressees understand grammatically affirmative questions as positive assertions; that is, the expected response is an affirmative one. An English example would be the question, “Are you cheating?”, with addressees hearing the positive assertion, “You are cheating!” (for a Papuan Malay example see (22) in §3.1.2.2). Along similar lines, addressees understand grammatically negative questions as negative assertions; that is, the expected response is a negative one. An example in English is the question, “Didn’t you listen to ...?”, with addressees hearing the negative assertion, “You didn’t listen to ...!” (for a Papuan Malay example see (16) in §3.1.2.1). As for polar questions with unmatched polarity, addressees understand grammatically negative questions as positive assertions. An example in English is the question, “You are not cheating?”, with addressees hearing the positive assertion “You are cheating!” (for a Papuan Malay example see (14) in §3.1.2.1). In like manner, addressees interpret grammatically affirmative questions as negative assertions; a comparable example in English is the question, “Did you listen to ...?” with addressees hearing the negative assertion, “You didn’t listen to ...!” (for a Papuan Malay example see (20) in §3.1.2.2).

In addition to polar questions, Papuan Malay speakers also employ content questions to convey assertions. Unlike content questions proper which do not expect a certain answer, these content questions function like polar questions with unmatched polarity, expecting a certain answer. More specifically, grammatically affirmative content questions are equivalent to negative assertions in which the interrogative is replaced by some synonym of “zero”, such as ‘no one’, ‘nothing’, or ‘nowhere’. A comparable example in English is, “Who told you to ...?”, with the addressee understanding the negative assertion, “No one told you to ...!” (for a Papuan Malay example see (13) in §3.1.2.1). Along similar lines, grammatically negative content questions are equivalent to positive assertions in which the interrogative is substituted by some synonym of “every”, such as ‘everyone’, ‘everything’, or ‘everywhere’. An English example would be, “Who wouldn’t know ...?”, with the addressee hearing the positive assertion, “Everyone knows ...!” (for a Papuan Malay example see (21) in §3.1.2.2). (For a detailed discussion of “wh- reversed polarity questions”, see Koshik 1999: 39–70.)

Concerning communicating negative evaluations, speakers use content questions proper with neutral polarity. An example in English is the question, “Why did you follow me?”, with the addressee hearing the negative evaluation, “You shouldn’t have followed me!” (for the original Papuan example see (26) in §3.1.3).

As for statements of incertitude, speakers typically realize them as content questions proper with neutral polarity. An English example would be, “When will we meet again?”, with the addressee hearing the statement of incertitude, “I don’t know when we’ll meet again!” (for the original Papuan Malay example see (30) in §3.1.4). In addition, although less frequently, speakers express statements of incertitude as polar questions with



matched polarity. A parallel example in English is the question, “You’ve already finished the meeting?”, with the addressee understanding the statement of incertitude, “I’m perplexed that you’ve already finished the meeting!” (for the original Papuan Malay example see (33) in §3.1.4).

### 3.1.2 Assertions

A major function of pseudo questions is to communicate both positive and negative assertions. In this function speakers employ them as statements of certitude to convey the fact that they are certain of what they are saying. Very commonly, the assertions are accompanied by emotional undertones which are derived from the speaker’s tone of voice at time of production and/or the context of the question.

As mentioned in §3.1.1, the assertions can be realized as polar questions or as content questions. In the case of polar questions, speakers use questions with variously matched or unmatched polarity. In either case, the questions can be grammatically affirmative or negative.

The following sections discuss pseudo questions communicating assertions in more detail: negative assertions are examined in §3.1.2.1, and positive assertions in §3.1.2.2.

#### 3.1.2.1 Negative assertions

Pseudo questions are very commonly used to convey negative assertions, as shown in (13) to (17). Most often, speakers use them to challenge their interlocutors, as in (13) and (14), or to reproach them, as in (15) and (16). The speakers’ tone of voice at time of production as well as the context indicate that these challenges and rebukes are accompanied by negative feelings. Pseudo questions that serve as negative assertions are only rarely used to tease an interlocutor good-naturedly, as in (17). In addition, speakers employ pseudo questions as negative assertions to make thoughtful statements, as in (18) and (19). In this function, the speaker’s tone of voice is composed and factual and does not carry any emotional undertones.

In the corpus, pseudo questions which convey negative assertions and thus serve to challenge one’s interlocutors are most often realized as content questions with unmatched polarity. The expected response is always some synonym of “zero”, such as ‘nothing’ in (13). Considerably less frequently in negative assertions, speakers employ polar questions. In each of the attested cases, the polar question is a grammatically affirmative one with unmatched polarity; that is, the expected answer is negative, as in (14).

#### Negative assertions as challenges

- (13) *a, sembu apa?*  
ah be.healed what  
[Nephew: ‘(I already) recovered’] Aunt: ‘ah, (from) what (did you) “recover”?’
- (14) ... *kalo ko tutup pintu ko bisa liat orang di luar?, de bilang,*  
if 2SG close door 2SG be.capable see person at outside 3SG say  
*Salome ko bisa liat orang di luar?*  
Salome 2SG be.capable see person at outside  
[About hospitality:] ‘(my father said to me,) “if you close the door, can you see the people outside?”’  
he said, “can you Salome see the people outside?”

The example in (13) occurred during a conversation between an aunt and her nephew who was sick with malaria. When his aunt told him to get a blood test, the nephew refused claiming that he was already cured. His aunt responds by asking him from *apa* ‘what’ he had recovered. By that, she makes the negative assertion that he had recovered from ‘nothing’; he had not recovered at all. The assertion serves to challenge the nephew’s false claim with the tone of her voice further suggesting that the aunt is annoyed about her nephew’s stubborn behavior. The utterance in (14) is part of a conversation about the speaker’s upbringing and how her parents taught her to be hospitable. When having their meals, the speaker’s parents left the door of their house open so that they could see by-passing neighbors and relatives and invite those in who were poor and hungry. Whenever the speaker wanted to close the door so that she could eat without having to pay attention to her surroundings, her father would ask her the negative question whether she was able to see the people outside if she closed the door. Thereby, the father made the negative assertion that she was not able at all to see the

people outside, challenging her refusal to be hospitable and generous. The immediate context of the rhetorical question does not give any indications concerning the father's underlying emotions. A few sentences later, however, the speaker relates that her father used to slap her in the face whenever she behaved in a self-protective, unhospitable manner. This, in turn, suggests that the father was angry with his daughter when she closed the door in order to keep potential guests outside.

Pseudo questions are also employed to make negative assertions which serve as rebukes or reproaches. In the corpus, this function is most often realized with content questions with unmatched polarity, with the expected response being some synonym of "zero", such as 'never' in (15). Much less frequently, speakers employ polar questions. In each of the attested cases, the polar question is a grammatically negative one with matched polarity, and the expected answer is negative, as (16).

### Negative assertions as rebukes

- (15) *kapang ko bla?*  
when 2SG split  
[Replying to her boasting cousin:] 'when did you split (fire)wood?'
- (16) *e, kamu tra putar te?*  
hey 2PL NEG turn.around tea  
[Coming into the kitchen:] 'hey, you didn't make any tea?'

The utterance in (15) occurred during a conversation between two teenagers. The speaker's cousin is boasting how early he got up that morning to split firewood. Knowing that it was not her cousin but her uncle who had split the firewood that morning, the speaker asks *kapang* 'when' he had split the firewood. Thereby, she makes the negative assertion that he 'never' split the firewood in the morning. With this assertion the speaker rebukes her cousin for this boastful lie, with her voice carrying an undertone of sarcasm that would reinforce the rebuke. The utterance in (16) occurred when a mother came into the kitchen and noticed that her children had not prepared the afternoon tea although they were expected to do so. Asking a grammatically negative question, the mother makes the negative assertion that her children had not made any tea. Thereby, she reproaches them for not having done their chores. In addition, the tone of the mother's voice suggests that she is upset and disappointed about her children's unreliability.

In addition, although only rarely, pseudo questions convey negative assertions which serve as good-natured banter. The example in (17) is the only one attested. The assertion is realized as a grammatically affirmative question with unmatched polarity; that is, the expected answer is negative.

### Negative assertions as good-natured banter

- (17) *kwe kalo sa bawa dari sini lima hari bisa tahan ka?*  
cake if 1SG bring from L.PROX five day can hold(.out/back) or  
[About an upcoming visit:] [Daughter: 'father, are you going to bring cake?'] Father: 'cake, if I bring (some) from here, can it last for five days?'

The utterance in (17) occurred during a phone conversation between a father and his daughter whom he had not seen in many years. The father plans to visit his daughter and her two brothers by ship the following month. In discussing the details of this visit the daughter asks her father whether he were going to bring any cake. In responding, the father asks the grammatically affirmative question whether the cake would survive the five-day long journey. Thereby, he makes the negative assertion that the cake would not survive the boat trip. The daughter's reaction is one of laughter. This reaction, together with the speaker's tone of voice suggest that the father's attitude is a positive teasing one.

In (13) to (17), the pseudo questions conveying negative assertions are emotionally charged. They are not always accompanied by strong feelings, however. Speakers also use them to make thoughtful statements that do not carry any emotional undertones; the speakers' tone of voice is calm and factual. In the corpus, this

function is most often realized with content questions with unmatched polarity, with the expected response being some synonym of “zero”, such as ‘no one’ in (18) or ‘nothing’ in (19).

### Negative assertions as thoughtful statements

- (18) ... *buang air siapa yang mo angkat?, sakit siapa yang mo tolong ambil kayu?*  
discard water who REL want lift be.sick who REL want help fetch wood  
[About child-less old people:] ‘... (when they) need to go to the toilet, who will take it (away)?, (when they’re) sick, who will help (them and) fetch (fire)wood?’
- (19) *itu tu rahasia!, mo mo biking apa ka?, mo bicara apa ka?, ... sa ini*  
D.DIST D.DIST secret want want make what or want speak what or 1SG D.PROX  
*cuma cuma kasi jalang saja*  
just just give walk just  
[About raising children:] ‘that (EMPH) is the secret!, what should (one) do (about this difficulty)?, what should (one) say?’ ... I (EMPH) just just show a way (out)’

In (18), the speaker contemplates the difficulties childless people experience in their old age. Asking *siapa* ‘who’ will help them, the speaker makes the thoughtful negative assertion that there will be ‘no one’ to look after them and help them with their daily needs, such as their personal hygiene or getting firewood. The example in (19) is part of a conversation about raising one’s children well and what to do when the children are faced with difficulties. Asking *apa* ‘what’ one should do or *apa* ‘what’ one should say when the children are faced with difficulties, the speaker makes the thoughtful negative assertion that it is best to say ‘nothing’ and to do ‘nothing’. That is, the secret of raising children well is to give advice without inferring too much. This is supported by the fact that, in both (18) and (19), the speakers’ tone of voice was calm and emotionally undefined.

### 3.1.2.2 Positive assertions

Pseudo questions are also used to make positive assertions, as shown in (20) to (25). Similar to pseudo questions communicating negative assertions, speakers employ them to challenge their interlocutors, as in (20) and (21), to rebuke them, as in (22) and (23). Similar to the negative assertions discussed in §3.1.2.1, the speakers’ tone of voice and the overall context suggest that the challenges and rebukes carry a negative emotional undertone. In addition, speakers use pseudo questions as positive assertions to tease their interlocutors good-naturedly, as in (24) and (25). In this function, the underlying emotions seem to be positive.

In the corpus, this function of pseudo questions is typically realized with polar questions. Most of them are grammatically affirmative questions with matched polarity, and thus, the expected response is affirmative, as in (22). Less frequently, speakers employ grammatically negative questions with unmatched polarity in which case the expected answer is again affirmative, as in (20). Furthermore, albeit rarely, speakers use content questions with unmatched polarity; the expected answer is always some synonym of “every”, such as ‘everyone’ in (21).

### Positive assertions as challenges

- (20) *ko pikir sa tida bisa bicara ka? sa tida bisa dengar*  
2SG think 1SG NEG be.capable speak or 1SG NEG be.capable hear  
[After having been insulted by a fellow student:] ‘do you think (that) I can’t speak?, (that) I can’t hear?’
- (21) *pemuda mana yang sa tra hafal?, sa hafal smua!*  
youth where REL 1SG NEG memorize 1SG memorize all  
‘which young people (are the ones) whom I don’t remember?, I remember all of them!’

In (20) and (21), the speakers employ pseudo questions communicating positive assertions to challenge their interlocutors. In both examples, the speakers use questions with unmatched polarity. In (20), the speaker relates how her niece responded after having been insulted by another teenager. In making this insult, the teenager had treated the niece as if she were mute, deaf, and stupid. In responding to this insult, the niece asks this teenager two grammatically negative questions, namely whether she, the teenager, thought that she, the niece, was not capable of speaking and not capable of hearing. By asking these questions, the speaker makes the positive assertion that she is neither mute nor deaf. Thereby, she challenges the teenager's insulting remarks. The immediate context of the rhetorical question does not give any indications concerning the niece's underlying emotions. A few sentences later, however, the speaker relates that her niece cried after this incidence. This, in turn, suggests that she felt distressed, hurt, and sad upon the insult. The example in (21) is one of two pseudo questions expressing a positive assertion formed with a content question. The utterance occurred during a conversation when the speaker felt accused of not remembering a certain young acquaintance. She responds by asking *pemuda mana* 'which youth' she does not remember. By that, the speaker makes the positive assertion that she does remember each and every one of her acquaintances. The assertion serves to challenge and refute the wrong accusation of the speaker's interlocutor, with the tone of the speaker's voice further suggesting that she is annoyed about the unjustified allegation.

The pseudo questions in (22) and (23) communicate positive assertions which serve as rebukes or reproaches. In both examples the polar questions are again affirmative ones with matched polarity.

### Positive assertions as rebukes

- (22) *yo, ko su minta ijing, ko alpa ka?*  
yes 2SG already request permission 2SG be.absent or  
'yes, you already asked for permission, you're going to play hooky?'

- (23) *ko gila ka?*  
2SG be.crazy or  
'are you crazy?'

The pseudo question in (22) occurred during a conversation between a mother and her son. As the family wants to go on a trip, the son wants to obtain a leave of absence from school. Although his mother had already told him repeatedly that it is too early to ask for a leave, the son insists on requesting the leave now. Finally, he makes the false claim that he had already asked for a leave. Asking a grammatically affirmative question, the mother makes the positive assertion that her son is apparently going to play hooky. Thereby, she scolds him for his lie. The tone of the mother's voice furthermore indicates that she feels upset with her son and exasperated by his unreasonable stubbornness. The utterance in (23) occurred during a conversation about an acquaintance who mistook the speaker for another person. When the daughter of this presumed other person passes by, she remarks that the speaker had not paid any attention to his relative, namely the daughter's father. The speaker replies by asking a grammatically affirmative question. Thereby, he makes the positive assertion that the daughter was obviously crazy to think that he was her father's relative. In this manner, he reproaches the young woman, ridiculing her for having mistaken him for someone else. The wording of the pseudo question seems pretty harsh. The tone of the speaker's voice suggests, however, that the reproach is a rather mild one.

In (24) and (25), the pseudo questions express positive assertions which serve as good-natured banter. The question in (24) is a negative one with unmatched polarity, while the question in (25) is an affirmative one with matched polarity.

### Positive assertions as good-natured banter

- (24) *sa yang lahir baru sa tra kenal itu ajaip itu?*  
1SG REL give.birth and.then 1SG NEG know D.DIST be.miraculous D.DIST  
[About his son:] '(he) was born to me and then I won't recognize that that wonder(ful child)?' (Lit. 'I gave birth')

- (25) *ko su bosang bicara deng bapa ka?*  
 2SG already be.bored speak with father or  
 [Phone conversation between a father and his daughter:] ‘do you already feel bo[SpM] bored talking with me (‘father’)?

The utterance in (24) is part of the mentioned phone conversation between a father and his daughter. As indicated, the father plans to visit his children by ship the following month. As they have not met in several years, the daughter is concerned that her father will not recognize her younger brother when they come to the harbor to pick him up. Asking the grammatically negative question whether he was not going to recognize the child that was born to him, the father makes the positive assertion that of course he will recognize his son. In a different context the father’s underlying emotion could be a defensive, reproachful one. In this context, however, his attitude appears to be a positive teasing one, which is evidenced by the fact that his daughter’s reaction is one of laughter. The example in (25) is part of the same phone conversation. After having answered her father a number of times in monosyllables, the speaker asks his daughter a grammatically affirmative question. Thereby, he makes the positive assertion that his daughter is obviously already feeling bored talking to him. Again, in a different context, the father’s reaction might serve as a reproach. As in (24), however, the daughter’s reaction is once more one of laughter, indicating that her father’s attitude is again a positive teasing one.

### 3.1.3 Negative evaluations

A second function of pseudo questions is to communicate evaluations. Speakers employ them to express their opinions as to whether an action, utterance, or attitude is good or bad, right or wrong. As shown in (26) to (28), such evaluations serve to express disapproval; evaluations of approval are unattested. Typically, the evaluations are accompanied by emotional undertones. As with the assertions described in §3.1.2, the emotional attitudes are derived from the speaker’s tone of voice and/or the context of the question. One possible explanation why speakers use pseudo questions to convey negative evaluations is that they provide a more indirect, face-preserving strategy to criticize an interlocutor. (See also Kluge 2017: 349–350 for other indirect and face-preserving strategies in Papuan Malay.)

Speakers communicate negative evaluations to rebuke their interlocutors. In the corpus, this function of pseudo questions is realized with content questions, while polar questions are unattested. About half of the attested questions impugn reasons and motives by asking *knapa* ‘why’, *untuk apa* or *buat apa* ‘what for’, as in (26) and (27); other interrogatives are also used, however, as shown in (28) and (29).

#### Negative evaluations with *knapa* ‘why’ and *untuk apa* ‘what for’

- (26) *mama su bilang, ko tinggal, knapa ko ikut sa ke mari?*  
 mother already say 2SG stay why 2SG follow 1SG to hither  
 [Addressing her daughter:] ‘I already said “you stay (behind)”, why did you follow me here?’
- (27) *kamu ana skola itu makang pinang untuk apa?*  
 2PL child school D.DIST eat betel.nut for what  
 ‘what for are you school kids (EMPH) chewing betel nuts?’

The utterance in (26) is part of a narrative about a meeting. The speaker relates how her daughter had followed her to that meeting even though she was not supposed to do so. Asking *knapa* ‘why’, the speaker conveys her negative evaluation of her daughter’s behavior. Thereby, she reproaches her daughter for not having followed her orders. The speaker’s voice furthermore implies that she was quite angry with her daughter’s disobedience. In (27), an older sister observes her younger siblings and cousins chewing betel nuts. She asks them *untuk apa* ‘what for’ they, as school students, chew betel nuts. By that she communicates her negative evaluation of their behavior, admonishing them for wasting their time and money instead of paying more attention to their school work. The rebuke is further reinforced by the intonation of the speaker’s voice which suggests that she is resentful of the teenagers’ behavior.

### Negative evaluations with *apa* ‘what’ and *mana* ‘where’

- (28) *de bilang, ko tidor apa?*  
 SG say 2SG sleep what  
 ‘[and then he said, “hey, it’s already (day)light after all!”], he said, “what are you sleeping (for)?”’
- (29) *yo, minta ijing, ko mo ke mana?*  
 yes request permission 2SG want to where  
 ‘yes, ask for a leave of absence (from school), where do you want to go?’

In (28), the speaker relates how, a few days ago, he was asleep during the daytime. An acquaintance comes to see him. Upon finding him asleep, the visitor bangs at the window. After having waken up the speaker, the acquaintance asks *apa* ‘what’ the speaker was sleeping for. Thereby, the visitor communicates his negative evaluation of the speaker’s behavior, reproaching him for being asleep during daytime. Moreover, in quoting his visitor, the speaker’s voice suggests that his acquaintance was feeling rather impatient and indignant with him. The pseudo question in (29) occurred during the mentioned conversation between a mother and her son. As the family wants to go on a trip, the son wants to obtain a leave of absence from school. Although his mother had already told him repeatedly that it is too early to ask for a leave, the son insists on requesting the leave on the next day. At this point the mother asks her son *mana* ‘where’ he wants to go with this leave. Thereby, she expresses her overall negative evaluation of her son’s behavior, rebuking him for his stubborn, unreasonable insistence. In addition, the mother’s voice carries an undertone of sarcasm and ridicule which reinforces the rebuke.

#### 3.1.4 Statements of incertitude

A third function of pseudo questions is to express incertitude in various forms, such as doubt and uncertainty, perplexity, or deliberation. Doubt and uncertainty characterize a state of apprehension about the future, as demonstrated in (30) and (31). Perplexity represents a state of confusion and bewilderment, as shown in (32) to (35). Deliberation refers to the process of thought by which an issue is carefully considered, as illustrated in (36) and (37). Statements of incertitude may or may not carry emotional undertones. Again, the emotional undertones are derived from the speaker’s tone of voice and/or the context of the question.

In the corpus, this third function of pseudo questions is most often realized with content questions, as in (30) to (32) and (34). Considerably less frequently, speakers employ polar questions, namely grammatically affirmative questions with matched polarity; that is, the expected answer is affirmative, as in (33) and (35). Speakers use these affirmative polar questions to express perplexity.

The pseudo questions conveying incertitude in (30) and (31) serve to convey doubt and uncertainty. More specifically, doubt and uncertainty characterize a state of mind which may be entered after being confronted with evidence which does not lend itself to any firm conclusion. This, in turn, leads to a state of apprehension about the future. Such questions are equivalent to statements of the type, “We don’t know who/what/when/where/how ...!” Typically, these expressions carry an emotional undertone of alarm, disquiet, and uneasiness.

### Statements of incertitude as expressions of doubt and uncertainty

- (30) *pluk saya menangis, kapang kitong ketemu?, prempuang yang baik begini*  
 embrace 1SG cry when 1PL meet woman REL be.good like.this  
*kitong mo liat di mana?*  
 1PL want see at where  
 [Moving to a different village:] ‘(they) hugged me (while) crying, “when will we meet (again)? where will we find (another) woman who’s as good (as you are)?”’

- (31) *a, bulang depan nanti bagemana?, adooo, bagemana ini?*  
ah month front very.soon how oh.no! how D.PROX  
[Insufficient financial support:] ‘ah, how (are things going to be) next month?, oh no! how (EMPH)?’

The utterance in (30) is part of a narrative about the speaker’s life in her husband’s village. Over time, she became well respected and beloved by her in-laws. Hence, when the couple decides to move to the regency capital, the speaker’s in-laws are sad and upset, asking *kapang* ‘when’ they would meet again, and *mana* ‘where’ they would find a good woman like her again. In asking these questions, the in-laws express their incertitude about the future of their relationship, conveying feelings of apprehension. In (31), the speaker relates his reaction after he had heard that his father would delay his monthly money transfer until the following month. Asking *bagemana* ‘how’ things will look like next month, the speaker conveys his incertitude and concern as to whether next month’s transfer will actually happen or not.

Pseudo questions communicating incertitude also serve as expressions of perplexity. More specifically, expressions of perplexity represent a state of confusion and bewilderment which are equivalent to statements of the type, “We are surprised that ...!” Such a state of confusion, in turn, leads to the inability to understand or deal with something. Typically, expressions of perplexity are accompanied by emotional undertones conveying feelings of negative surprise or consternation as in (32) and (33), or feelings of positive surprise or amazement as in (34) and (35).

The pseudo questions conveying incertitude in (32) and (33) serve to express perplexity with an emotional undertone of negative surprise or consternation.

#### Statements of incertitude as expressions of perplexity with an emotional undertone of negative surprise or consternation

- (32) *ko bisa kasi? ko bisa kasi?, de juga tanya, bagemana ko bisa ana ini?*  
2SG can give 2SG can give 3SG also ask how 2SG can child D.PROX  
[About giving a child to a childless relative:] “you can give (away your child)? you can give (away your child)?”, she also asked “how can you give (away) this child?”
- (33) *i, kam su selesay?*  
ugh 2PL already finish  
[About a meeting:] ‘ugh, you have already finished (the meeting)?’

The example in (32) is part of a conversation about the customs of giving a child to a childless relative. The speaker relates how she once told an acquaintance, who was unfamiliar with this custom, that she had just given away her newborn child to a childless relative. In (32), the speaker echoes her acquaintance who responds with two pseudo questions, namely the grammatically affirmative question whether she, the speaker, can give away her child, and *bagemana* ‘how’ she can give away her child. Both questions convey the acquaintance’s perplexity about the speaker’s behavior. In addition, the speaker’s tone of voice as well as the context indicate that the acquaintance was negatively surprised and consternated about the speaker’s shocking generosity. The utterance in (33) occurred during a conversation about a meeting at the regent’s office. The speaker’s interlocutor relates that they were already done. While the interlocutor only refers to the discussion about the budget, the speaker gets the impression that the entire meeting is already over. Asking the grammatically affirmative question whether they were already done, the speaker conveys her bewilderment about the supposed rushed ending of the meeting. Again, the tone of voice and the context suggest that the speaker is consternated about this ending, with the interjection *i* ‘ugh’ underlining her negative surprise.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Interjection *i* ‘ugh’ expresses disgust, irritation, or disappointed surprise (for more details on Papuan Malay interjections see Kluge 2017: 316–319).

In the utterances in (34) and (35), the pseudo questions serve to express perplexity with an emotional undertone of positive surprise or amazement.

### Statements of incertitude as expressions of perplexity with an emotional undertone of positive surprise or amazement

- (34) *Tuhang buat mujisat luar biasa itu, alkitap knapa tida basa?,*  
 God make miracle outside be.usual D.DIST Bible why NEG be.wet  
*buku~buku laing hancur*  
 RDP~book be.different be.shattered  
 [After a heavy rain storm on a ship:] ‘God did that amazing miracle, the Bible, why wasn’t (it) wet?, the other books got ruined (from the rain)’
- (35) *tida perna dia liat, ko sungay ko bisa terbuka begini sampe ada laut,*  
 NEG once 3sg see 2SG river 2SG be.able be.opened like.this until exit ocean  
*ada langit turun?*  
 exist sky descend  
 [Seeing the ocean for the first time:] ‘[never before has he seen, what, a river that is so very big like this ocean,] never before has he seen (something like this), “you, you river can be wide like this that it meets the sky?”’ (Lit. ‘be opened like this until the ocean, until the sky comes down’)<sup>9</sup>

The example in (34) is part of a narrative about a stormy boat trip during which all of the speaker’s books got ruined except for her Bible. With her question *knapa* ‘why’ her Bible did not get wet, the speaker conveys her perplexity. The speaker’s tone of voice together with the overall context indicate that she is positively surprised and amazed about this situation. The utterance in (35) relates how an ancestor came down from the interior to see the ocean for the first time. Asking the grammatically affirmative question whether a river can indeed be that wide, the speaker expresses his perplexity about the vastness of the ocean. Again, the tone of voice and the overall context suggest that the speaker is positively surprised and overcome by amazement about the open sea.

Finally, pseudo questions expressing incertitude may also serve as deliberations. More specifically, deliberation is understood as the process of thoughtfully considering and weighing different options and/or evidence which, in turn, will lead to some action or conclusion, as demonstrated in (36). In addition, deliberation is understood as the process of trying to remember someone or something forgotten, as shown in (37). In both cases, the speakers’ tone of voice is calm and factual, and not accompanied by any noticeable emotional undertones.

### Statements of incertitude as deliberations

- (36) *ini mungking besok sa su ambil, apa, grobak, apa, skop, de punya*  
 D.PROX maybe tomorrow 1SG already fetch what wheelbarrow what shovel 3SG POSS  
*alat untuk kerja, blum, hanya mo kas masuk di mana?*  
 equipment for work not.yet only want CAUS enter at where  
 [About a building project:] ‘maybe tomorrow I will already have gotten hold of, what, a wheelbarrow, what, shovels, his equipment to work, (but I) don’t yet, but where (am I going) to store the equipment?’
- (37) *hari apa yang sa ketemu dia e?*  
 day what REL 1SG meet 3SG eh  
 ‘which day (was it) that I met her, eh?’

<sup>9</sup> Addressing a non-speech-act participant such as *sungay* ‘river’ with second person *ko* ‘2SG’ serves as a rhetorical figure of speech, namely as an apostrophe (for details see Kluge 2017: 351–352).



In (36), the speaker talks about the next steps in a building project and her hope to obtain the necessary equipment on the next day. Listing the different pieces she contemplates *mana* ‘where’ she is going to store the equipment. The example in (37) illustrates how speakers employ pseudo questions as deliberations when trying to remember something or someone forgotten. The utterance occurred during a conversation about an acquaintance. The speaker ponders *hari apa* ‘what day’ he had last met his acquaintance. In both examples, the speakers’ tone of voice is factual and emotionally undefined.

### 3.2 Stimulus questions and their discourse-stimulating functions

A second basic type of rhetorical questions are stimulus questions. As mentioned, they have discourse-stimulating functions in that they announce a new topic or a new aspect of the same topic, or signal a clarification or an explanation.

In Papuan Malay, speakers use stimulus questions to introduce some new aspect concerning the topic under discussion, as illustrated in (38) to (41).

- (38) *tapi mana yang dong sayang?, dong pu ana sendiri juga tapi kalo ko berbuat baik*  
but where REL 3PL love 3PL POSS child alone also but if 2SG make be.good  
*dalam keluarga itu, ko tida susa*  
in family D.DIST 2SG NEG be.difficult  
[About school students staying with strangers:] ‘but whom do they love?, (they love) their own children, but if you behave well in that family, you won’t have difficulties’

The utterance in (38) is part of conversation about the regional school situation. The only senior high school in the larger region is located in the regency capital. Hence, in order to attend high school many students from rural communities have to stay with strangers, some of whom do not treat their young guests well. With her stimulus question *mana* ‘which’ kind of people these hosts love, the speaker introduces a new aspect to the discussion, namely that good behavior will result in good treatment.

- (39) *siapa yang bawa dorang dari sana?, saya dengang Domi!*  
who REL bring 3PL from L.DIST 1SG with Dominggus  
[Preparations for a youth retreat:] ‘who’s going to (pick them up and) bring them from over there?, I and Domi!’

The stimulus question in (39) occurred during a conversation about the logistics for an upcoming youth retreat with the speaker being one of the organizers. He asks the stimulus question *siapa* ‘who’ is going to drive to a remote village to bring a group of youth from there to the village hosting the retreat. The speaker uses his question as an introduction to a new aspect, namely that he himself and another friend are going to pick them up.

- (40) *baru dia pu ana~ana di mana?, tra ada*  
and.then 3SG POSS RDP~child at where NEG exist  
[About an ancestor] ‘and where are his children?, there aren’t (any)!’

- (41) *jadi akhirnya apa yang terjadi?, de biking malam*  
so finally what REL happen 3SG make night  
[About an ancestor:] ‘so finally what happened?, he created the night!’

The stimulus question in (40) is part of a story about an ancestor. The speaker relates how this ancestor met a certain couple for the first time. After a while the ancestor notices that there are no children around. The speaker relates how the ancestor asks himself *mana* ‘where’ the couple’s children are. The question serves as an introduction to a new aspect, namely that the couple is childless and how this situation might be amended. After having elaborated the situation of this couple further, the speaker returns to the ancestor and his deeds in

(41). With his rhetorical question about *apa* ‘what’ finally happened, the speaker introduces a new aspect, namely that the ancestor created the night.

#### 4 Quantitative analysis of Papuan Malay rhetorical questions

The examples discussed in §3.1 and §3.2 show that Papuan Malay speakers make use of two different types of rhetorical questions, namely pseudo questions which have social functions, and stimulus questions which have discourse-stimulating function. This section quantifies these findings and investigates whether and to what extent Papuan Malay speakers have preferences in employing these types of rhetorical questions.

A quantitative analysis of the attested 231 rhetorical questions indicates that Papuan Malay speakers most often employ pseudo questions (197/231 – 85%) while the discourse-stimulating function of rhetorical questions is only a marginal one (34/231 – 15%). In the following, speaker preferences regarding the pseudo questions are examined first, followed by a quantitative analysis of the attested stimulus questions.

The examples presented in §3.1.2 to §3.1.4 show that pseudo questions have different pragmatic functions. Speakers employ them to communicate negative and positive assertions, negative evaluations, and statements of incertitude. These functions of pseudo questions are realized with polar questions or with content questions. Polar questions may have matched or unmatched polarity, whereas content questions have either neutral polarity or unmatched polarity (for details see §3.1.1).

A quantitative analysis of the attested pseudo questions suggests that Papuan Malay speakers have clear preferences regarding the question and polarity types in realizing the different functions of pseudo questions (see Table 2).

**Table 2:** Distribution of pseudo question and polarity types across functions<sup>10</sup>

| Question & polarity types            | Functions     |               |             |         | Total |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|---------|-------|
|                                      | Assert. (neg) | Assert. (pos) | Eval. (neg) | Incert. |       |
| Polar question: matched polarity     | 6             | 19            |             | 6       | 31    |
| Polar question: unmatched polarity   | 13            | 5             |             |         | 18    |
| Content question: unmatched polarity | 69            | 2             |             |         | 71    |
| Content question proper              |               |               | 41          | 36      | 77    |
| Total                                | 88            | 26            | 41          | 42      | 197   |

In the corpus the majority of the attested pseudo questions are realized as content questions (148/197 – 75%), as shown in Table 2. Of these, slightly more than half are content questions proper (77/148 – 52%), while slightly less than half are content questions with unmatched polarity (71/148 – 48%). As for the Papuan Malay interrogatives, all six are attested; likewise attested is the quantifier *brapa* ‘several’ in its function of questioning quantities in the sense of ‘how many’.<sup>11</sup> The remaining 49 pseudo questions are realized as polar questions (49/197 – 25%). Of these, about two thirds are polar questions with matched polarity (31/49 – 63%), while about one third are polar questions with unmatched polarity (18/49 – 37%).

Table 2 also indicates the distribution of the question and polarity types across the different functions. To convey assertions, speakers use questions with polarity, namely polar questions requiring yes/no answers, or content questions requiring responses that are some synonym of “zero” or “every”. More specifically, speakers prefer content questions with unmatched polarity to communicate negative assertions (69/88 – 78%).

<sup>10</sup> Abbreviations: Assert. = assertion, Eval. = evaluation, Incert. = incertitude.

Polar questions with matched polarity refer to grammatically affirmative questions with expected affirmative responses, as in (22), and to grammatically negative questions with expected negative responses, as in (16).

Polar questions with unmatched polarity refer to grammatically affirmative questions with expected negative responses, as in (14), and to grammatically negative questions with expected affirmative responses, as in (20).

Content questions with unmatched polarity refer to questions for which the expected answer is some synonym of “zero”, as in (13), or some synonym of “every”, as in (21).

<sup>11</sup> For more details on interrogatives see Kluge (2017: 287–301).

Moreover, although less frequently, negative assertions are expressed as polar questions with unmatched polarity (13/88 – 15%). Even less frequently, speakers use polar questions with matched polarity to convey negative assertions (6/88 – 7%). By contrast, most of the attested positive assertions are expressed as polar questions with matched polarity (19/26 – 73%). In addition, although less frequently, speakers employ content questions with unmatched polarity to communicate positive assertions (5/26 – 19%), while content questions with unmatched polarity are only rarely used (2/26 – 8%). Furthermore, Table 2 shows that speakers consistently use content questions proper to communicate negative evaluations (41/41 – 100%). Likewise, statements of incertitude are most often expressed with content questions proper (36/42 – 86%). In addition, although less frequently, statements of incertitude are communicated as polar questions with unmatched polarity (6/42 – 14%).

Typically, in fulfilling the different social functions, the attested pseudo questions are emotionally charged, with the tone of voice and/or the context of the question taken as indications of the speakers' underlying emotions, as described in §3.1.2 to §3.1.4.

In the corpus, the pseudo questions most often carry negative emotional undertones (165/197 – 84%), whereas pseudo questions accompanied by positive emotional undertones are rather rare (10/197 – 5%), as shown in Table 3. Pseudo questions that are emotionally uncharged, that is, that do not carry any noticeable emotional undertones, are also rather uncommon (22/197 – 11%) (in Table 3, this category of emotional undertones is labelled as “undefined”).

*Table 3: Distribution of pseudo question across functions and underlying emotions*

| Functions                | Underlying emotions |          |           | Total |
|--------------------------|---------------------|----------|-----------|-------|
|                          | Negative            | Positive | Undefined |       |
| Assertion (neg)          | 75                  | 1        | 12        | 88    |
| Assertion (pos)          | 21                  | 5        |           | 26    |
| Evaluation (neg)         | 41                  |          |           | 41    |
| Statement of incertitude | 28                  | 4        | 10        | 42    |
| Total                    | 165                 | 10       | 22        | 197   |

More specifically, Table 3 suggests that in communicating negative assertions, the underlying emotions tend to be negative ones (75/88 – 85%), such as feelings of anger as in (14), annoyance as in (13), disappointment as in (16), or sarcasm as in (15). In addition, the corpus includes one pseudo question that conveys a negative assertion with an underlying positive teasing emotion (1/88 – 1%); the example in (17) is the only one attested. Rather infrequently, negative assertions are emotionally uncharged (12/88 – 14%), as in the thoughtful statements in (18) and (19).

In expressing positive assertions, the underlying emotional attitudes also tend to be negative ones (21/26 – 81%), such as feelings of annoyance as in (21), distress, hurt, and sadness as in (20), exasperation as in (22), or ridicule as in (23). Considerably less frequently, positive assertions carry underlying positive emotions (5/26 – 19%), such as the positive teasing feelings in the good-natured banter in (24) and (25).

As for negative evaluations, Table 3 indicates that the underlying emotions are always negative ones (41/41 – 100%), such as feelings of anger as in (26), impatience and indignation as in (28), resentment as in (27), or sarcasm and ridicule as in (29).

Furthermore, Table 3 suggests that statements of incertitude tend to be accompanied by underlying negative feelings (28/42 – 67%). This includes expressions of doubt and uncertainty (13/42 – 31%) which communicate feelings of alarm, disquiet, and uneasiness, as in (30) and (31). It also includes expressions of perplexity (15/42 – 36%) which convey feelings of negative surprise or consternation, as in (32) and (33). Considerably less frequently, statements of incertitude are not accompanied by any emotional undertones. This applies to the attestations serving as deliberations (10/42 – 24%), as in (36) and (37). Still less frequently, statements of incertitude carry positive emotional undertones. In the corpus, this only applies expressions of perplexity communicating feelings of positive surprise or amazement (4/42 – 10%), as in (34) and (35).

Table 4 summarizes the distribution of the attested pseudo questions across question and polarity types and underlying emotions.

**Table 4:** Distribution of pseudo questions across question and polarity types and underlying emotions

| Question & polarity types            | Underlying emotions |          |           | Total |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|----------|-----------|-------|
|                                      | Negative            | Positive | Undefined |       |
| Polar question: matched polarity     | 26                  | 5        |           | 31    |
| Polar question: unmatched polarity   | 16                  | 2        |           | 18    |
| Content question: unmatched polarity | 59                  |          | 12        | 71    |
| Content question proper              | 64                  | 3        | 10        | 77    |
| Total                                | 165                 | 10       | 22        | 197   |

Table 4 indicates that most of the pseudo questions accompanied by underlying negative emotions are realized as content questions (123/165 – 75%); about half of them are content questions with unmatched polarity (59/123 – 48%) and half of them are content questions proper (64/123 – 52%). Much less frequently, pseudo questions with underlying negative emotions are realized as polar questions (42/165 – 25%), including polar questions with matched polarity (26/42 – 62%) and those with unmatched polarity (16/42 – 38%). Most pseudo questions with underlying positive emotions are realized as polar questions (7/10 – 70%), most of which have matched polarity (5/7 – 71%), while only two have unmatched polarity (2/7 – 29%). The remaining pseudo questions with underlying positive emotions are realized as content questions proper (3/10 – 30%). Pseudo questions that are not accompanied by emotional undertones are consistently realized as content questions (22/22 – 100%); slightly more than half of them are content questions with unmatched polarity (12/22 – 55%), while the remaining ones are content questions proper (10/22 – 45%).

As for the attested stimulus questions, the examples presented in §3.2 show that they have only one function, namely to introduce some new aspect concerning the topic under discussion. As mentioned, this discourse-stimulating function of rhetorical questions in Papuan Malay is only a marginal one, with only 15% of the attested rhetorical questions being stimulus questions (34/231). In addition, it is noted that almost half of the stimulus questions (16/34 – 47%) are posed by a young man who has a reputation of speaking incoherently due to his unsuccessful attempts of approximating Standard Indonesian. In addition, about one quarter of the questions (9/34 – 27%) are posed by a young woman who is known to show off with her training as a pastor and her ability to speak Standard Indonesian. This raises the question whether and to what extent the stimulus question tokens of both speakers should be included in this analysis of Papuan Malay rhetorical questions. Ignoring their utterances brings down the total number of rhetorical questions with discourse-stimulating function to nine. This in turn further marginalizes the discourse-stimulating function of rhetorical question in Papuan Malay with only 4.4% of all rhetorical questions (9/206<sup>12</sup>) apparently having this function.

As for the interrogative clause types used to realize the attested stimulus questions, all of them are content questions; that is, none are polar questions. Of the six Papuan Malay interrogatives, five are attested, only *kapang* ‘when’ is unattested. Likewise unattested is the quantifier *brapa* ‘several’ in its function of questioning quantities in the sense of ‘how many’.

## 5 Rhetorical questions cross-linguistically

This second part of the study on rhetorical questions explores whether and to what extent the lack of formal characteristics and the different functions of rhetorical questions in Papuan Malay are rather typical and widespread or rather uncommon within Malayic languages in general and other Austronesian and Papuan<sup>13</sup> languages of West Papua, an extensive cross-linguistic literature study was conducted. This study is based on the references given for each of the investigated languages in the *Glottolog 3.1* (Nordhoff et al. 2017). The inquiry was carried out in several steps with a widening scope regarding the genetic affiliations and geographical locations of the investigated languages. The findings of this research are presented in the following sections.

<sup>12</sup> Ignoring the 25 stimulus questions posed by the young man and the young woman brings down the total number of rhetorical questions from 231 to 206.

<sup>13</sup> Regarding the term “Papuan languages”, see Footnote **Error! Bookmark not defined..**

Given that Papuan Malay is an eastern regional Malay variety, the first step of this literature study focused on the other eastern Malay varieties. Within the Malayic branch, the *Glottolog* 3.1 (Nordhoff et al. 2017) classifies these Malay varieties as Vehicular Malay languages, and more specifically as Eastern Indonesia Trade Malay. Subsequently, the scope of this inquiry was extended to include the Vehicular Malay languages not situated in eastern Indonesia. In a next step, the inquiry was extended to include the remaining Malayic languages, as listed in the *Glottolog*, namely the Nuclear Malay varieties and the Western Malayic Dayak varieties. In total, this part of the literature study included all 59 Malayic languages. Subsequently the research scope was widened to include all 49 Austronesian spoken in West Papua, as listed in the *Glottolog*. In the final step of this inquiry, the scope was extended to include all 238 Papuan languages spoken in West Papua, again as listed in the *Glottolog*.

Cross-linguistically, rhetorical questions are a very common feature of naturally-occurring talk, especially in expressive and persuasive discourse (Payne 1997: 317). Yet, as Koshik (1999: 2) points out they “have not been studied extensively from either a linguistic or a language and social interaction perspective”. This observation also applies to the 346 languages included in the present literature study. Descriptions for only eleven of these languages discuss rhetorical questions, as far as the author could establish.

The findings for the literature study on the Vehicular Malay languages are presented in §5.1, followed by the results for the Malayic languages in general in §5.2. The findings for the Austronesian and Papuan languages of West Papua are discussed in §5.3 and §5.4, respectively. The findings of this literature study are summarized in §5.5.

### 5.1 Rhetorical questions in Vehicular Malay languages

The first step of this inquiry on rhetorical questions focused on the eleven Vehicular Malay varieties, as listed in the *Glottolog* (Nordhoff et al. 2017), including seven Malay varieties situated in eastern Indonesia and four varieties situated outside of eastern Indonesia.

Overall, the eastern regional Malay varieties have received only limited attention from linguistics. In seven of them, however, more or less thorough language descriptions are available, namely in Ambon Malay [abs] (van Minde 1997), Banda Malay [bpq] (Paauw 2009), Kupang Malay [mkn] (Paauw 2009), Larantuka Malay [lrt] (Kumanireng 1993; Paauw 2009), Manado Malay [xmm] (Lasut 2008; Stoel 2005), North Moluccan / Ternate Malay [max] (Litamahuputty 2012), and Papuan Malay [pmy] (Kluge 2017).<sup>14</sup> With the exception of Ambon Malay (van Minde 1997), however, none of these descriptions discusses rhetorical questions. Neither have linguistic articles been published on rhetorical questions in any of the regional Malay varieties, as far as the author could establish.

As for Ambon Malay, van Minde (1997: 269–270) provides some information about rhetorical questions, referring to them as ‘pseudo questions’. There are no formal characteristics that distinguish rhetorical questions from non-rhetorical questions. While van Minde does not discuss the pragmatic uses of Ambon Malay rhetorical questions, the label “pseudo questions” suggests that they have social functions while it is left unclear whether they also have discourse-stimulating functions. The provided examples suggest that Ambon Malay speakers use rhetorical questions to express negative evaluations and negative assertions (1997: 269–270), as shown in (42) and (43), respectively.

#### Rhetorical questions in Ambon Malay

- (42) *de manusia apa ni?!*  
 3SG human what this  
 ‘what kind of man is he?!’ [Intended reading: ‘he acts so foolishly!’] (van Minde 1997: 269)
- (43) *sapa paksa se ambe doriang tu?!*  
 who force 2SG take durian-fruit that  
 ‘who then would force you to take durian-fruits?!’ [Intended reading: ‘nobody would take durian-fruits!’] (van Minde 1997: 270)

<sup>14</sup> The *Glottolog* 3.0 (Nordhoff et al. 2017) classifies the seven eastern regional Malay varieties as Vehicular Malay languages within Malayic. The *Ethnologue* (Simons and Fennig 2018), by contrast, classifies these languages as Malay-based creoles.

In a next step, the inquiry focused on the remaining four Vehicular Malay varieties, as listed in the *Glottolog* (Nordhoff et al. 2017): Baba Malay [mbf], Makassar Malay [mfp], Malaccan Creole Malay [ccm], and Sri Lanka Malay [sci].

Grammars are available for two of these languages, namely Baba Malay (Lee 2014) and Sri Lanka Malay (Nordhoff 2009). Both grammars discuss rhetorical questions, albeit not very thoroughly. Lee (2014: 182–183) mentions one formal characteristic of rhetorical questions in Baba Malay, namely their lexical marking with *mana ada* ‘where EXIST’. Always occurring at the beginning of an utterance, the interrogative adverb signals negative assertions, as shown in (44). Other formal characteristics or functions of rhetorical questions in Baba Malay are not discussed.

### Rhetorical questions in Baba Malay

- (44) *mana ada piso?*  
where EXIST knife  
‘where is the knife?’ [Intended reading: ‘there is no knife!’] (Lee 2014: 183)

Nordhoff (2009) does not mention any formal characteristics that allow an unambiguous distinction between rhetorical questions and non-rhetorical ones. As for their functions, the author states that rhetorical questions are used to convey explanations (2009: 704). As such they appear to have discourse-stimulating function, as in (45).

### Rhetorical questions in Sri Lanka Malay

- (45) *kithang arà-thaaro ]aapa thaau=si[ jiimath?*  
1PL NON.PAST-put what know=INTERR talisman  
‘we put you know what?, a talisman’ (Nordhoff 2009: 536)<sup>15</sup>

## 5.2 Rhetorical questions in Malayic languages in general

Subsequently, the scope of the inquiry was extended to include the remaining Malayic languages, that is, the 45 Nuclear Malay varieties and the three Western Malayic Dayak varieties listed in the *Glottolog* (Nordhoff et al. 2017). Overall, more in-depth descriptions of these languages are limited to a few, namely four Nuclear Malayic languages: Standard Indonesian [inb] and Standard Malay [zsm] (Mintz 2002; Sneddon 2006), including colloquial Jakartan Indonesian (Sneddon 2006), as well as Jambi Malay [jax] (Yanti 2010), and Mualang [mtd] (Tjia 2007). Of these, only Tjia’s (2007) grammar of Mualang discusses rhetorical questions.

Tjia (2007: 254) mentions two formal characteristics of rhetorical questions in Mualang, namely a special intonation pattern and a special lexical marker. Typically, the particular intonation pattern is used with content questions, with the interrogative receiving a higher and longer pitch. In addition, the sentential intonation is falling at the clause end. An example is presented in (46), with the stressed interrogative being bolded. The second formal characteristic is a particular lexical marker, namely a special negative particle. Most often this is *ukay* ‘CONT.NEG’, as in (47), or a combination of *baday ... naday* ‘NEG’, as in (48).<sup>16</sup>

### Rhetorical questions in Mualang

- (46) *nti’ ia naday salah, ngapa kita N-padah salah?*  
if 3SG NEG wrong why 1PL.INCL ACT-say wrong  
‘if he was not wrong, why did we say he was’ (Tjia 2007: 254)

<sup>15</sup> The inverted brackets “[...]” indicate subordination (Nordhoff 2009: 535).

<sup>16</sup> The meaning of *baday* is unknown (Tjia 2007: 254).

(47) *ukay sempang urang tuay N-padah ...*  
 CONT.NEG proverb person old ACT-say  
 ‘doesn’t the proverb of the old people say ...’ (Tjia 2007: 254)

(48) *baday m’ih naday kitu’ agi’?*  
 baday 2SG.MASC NEG to.here again  
 ‘aren’t you coming here again?’ (Tjia 2007: 254)

The examples in (46) to (48) suggest that speakers employ rhetorical questions to communicate positive assertions. Tjia (2007) does not discuss any specific functions of rhetorical questions, however. He merely makes the general statement that they “ultimately serve the goal of convincing [... the] audience to agree with [... the speaker’s] point of view” (2007: 254).

### 5.3 Rhetorical questions in West Papua’s Austronesian languages

In another step, the inquiry scope on rhetorical questions was widened to include all 49 Austronesian languages spoken in West Papua, as listed in the *Glottolog* (Nordhoff et al. 2017), including the languages spoken on Adi Island, Liki Island, and the islands of Cenderawasih Bay. In-depth descriptions are available for only three of these languages, as far as the author could establish, namely the Greater South-Halmahera languages Ambai [amk] (Silzer 1983), Biak [bhw] (van den Heuvel 2006), and Irarutu [irh] (Jackson 2014). None of these descriptions discuss rhetorical questions, however.

### 5.4 Rhetorical questions in Papuan languages

Next, the scope of the inquiry on rhetorical questions was extended to include all 238 Papuan languages spoken in West Papua, as listed in the *Glottolog* (Nordhoff et al. 2017). In-depth descriptions are available in 21 of these languages, as far as the author could establish:

- Asmat-Awyu-Ok languages: Aghu [ahh] (van den Heuvel 2016), Kombai [tyn] (de Vries 1989, 1993), Korowai [khe] (van Enk and de Vries 1997), Wambon [wms] (de Vries 1989; de Vries and de Vries-Wiersma 1992)
- Dani languages: Lower Grand Valley Dani [dni] (Bromley 1981), Western Dani [dnw] (Barclay 2008), Nggem [nbq] (Etherington 2002), Pass Valley Yali [yac] (Fahner 1979), Wano [wno] (Burung 2017)
- East Bird Head languages: Meyah [mej] (Gravelle 2004), Moskona [mti] (Gravelle 2010)
- Hatam-Mansim languages: Hatam [had] (Reesink 1999)
- Mek languages: Eipomek [eip] (Heeschen 1998), Una [mtg] (Louwerse 1988)
- Morehead Wasur languages: Ngkâmpw Kanum [kcd] (Carroll 2016)
- Nimboranic languages: Nimboran [nir] (May 1997)
- Paniai Lakes languages: Auye [auu] (Moxness 2003, 2005)
- Sko languages: Skou [skv] (Donohue 2004)
- Isolates: Abun [kgr] (Berry and Berry 1999), Dera [kbv] (de Sousa 2006), Maybrat-Karon [ayz] (Dol 2007)

For seven of these languages, rhetorical questions are discussed in the respective descriptions, namely for Abun (Berry and Berry 1999), Auye (Moxness 2003, 2005), Lower Grand Valley Dani (Bromley 1981), Western Dani (Barclay 2008), Meyah (Gravelle 2004), Moskona (Gravelle 2010), and Una (Louwerse 1988).

In Abun, rhetorical questions have no formal characteristics that distinguish them from non-rhetorical questions (Berry and Berry 1999: 115). Regarding the functions of rhetorical questions in Abun, Berry and Berry (1999: 115–116) mention three functions. They communicate negative evaluations or commands, as in (49), incertitude (negative surprise, disgust, or uncertainty), as in (50), or negative assertions.

### Rhetorical questions in Abun

- (49) *nan nok wa suma ne?*  
 2SG afraid for what FQM  
 ‘why are you afraid?’ (Berry and Berry 1999: 116)
- (50) *ye ne Yesugote ye Waropen bado?*  
 person that Irianese person Waropen AQM  
 ‘was that Irianese person a Waropen person?’ (Berry and Berry 1999: 115)

For Auye, Moxness (2005) does not discuss any formal characteristics of rhetorical questions. Instead the author makes a very general comment about the functions of rhetorical questions: they are used as an “appeal to cultural norm” (2005: 22).

In Lower Grand Valley Dani, rhetorical questions have no formal characteristics that distinguish them from non-rhetorical ones (Bromley 1981: 306). Functions of rhetorical questions are not discussed in the grammar.

In Western Dani, rhetorical questions expressing positive or negative assertions are marked in two ways. Questions marked with the anaphoric referencer *nogo* ‘AA’ before the clause-final question marker signal that the requested information is already known to the addressee (Barclay 2008: 474–475). Questions marked with the rhetorical particle *ya* ‘Q<sub>RA</sub>’ after the final verb convey an emotionally charged challenge (2008: 475), as shown with the positive assertion in (51). In addition, Western Dani speakers employ rhetorical questions to express incertitude, namely their surprise or puzzlement about some information they have just heard (2008: 475, 505). Quite commonly, these questions are marked with the conjunction *kwe* ‘but’ in clause-final position together with a question word such as *nonggop* ‘how’, as in (52).

### Rhetorical questions in Western Dani

- (51) *nin- oor- iyak eyom awo kagak, aa’nduk nin- wa- gandak ya?*  
 us.PX<sub>OB</sub> hit IN time not.yet 3SG.SI<sub>D</sub> first us.PX<sub>OB</sub> came PA2.2SG Q<sub>RA</sub>  
 ‘have you come to attack us before the right time?’ (Barclay 2008: 475)
- (52) *iya! nonggop tongon yo- go agaarik kwe?*  
 E<sub>AM</sub> how say PL CO.PR.they but  
 ‘it’s amazing!, what are they saying?’ (Barclay 2008: 505)

For Meyah, Gravelle (2004) does not mention whether rhetorical questions have formal characteristics that distinguish them from non-rhetorical ones. Instead the author discusses the functions of rhetorical questions. They are used to express harsh rebukes, as shown in (53), or to admonish (2004: 333, 336, 364).

### Rhetorical questions in Meyah

- (53) *bi-en-ah gu mod-if rot meidu*  
 2SG-DUR-lie.down in house.this concerning what  
 ‘why are you in the house!’ (Gravelle 2004: 336)

In Moskona, rhetorical questions have a distinct intonation and structure that distinguish them from non-rhetorical ones (Gravelle 2010: 375). While information questions are marked with “an attitude marker cliticized to the clause-final element” rather than with a particular intonation pattern, rhetorical questions are marked with an “intonation contour [that] begins high and drifts downward throughout the clause” (2010: 378, 384). Furthermore, reprimand rhetorical questions are characterized by an interrogative phrase, such as *tínefa erogá* ‘why’, *tínefa ni* ‘for what (purpose)’, or *echa erogá* ‘when’, which occurs in sentence-initial position, with no pause separating it from the following clause (2010: 384). The function of rhetorical questions is to communicate strong rebukes. The form and function of Moskona rhetorical questions are illustrated in (54).



## Rhetorical questions in Moskona

- (54) *tinefa erogá bua bi-oksomus fen dif?!  
 how hence you.SG 2SG-return from I  
 ‘why did you return without me?’ (Gravelle 2010: 384)*

In Una, rhetorical questions have no formal characteristics that distinguish them from non-rhetorical ones (Louwerse 1988: 54). As for their functions, the author merely submits that they “give color to the discourse” (1988: 164).

### 5.5 Summary of rhetorical questions cross-linguistically

This section summarizes the findings from the literature study on rhetorical questions, presented in §5.1 to §5.4. As mentioned, this study was based on the references given for each of the investigated languages in the *Glottolog 3.1* (Nordhoff et al. 2017). In total, the references for 346 languages were examined, including all 59 Malayic languages, all 49 Austronesian languages spoken in West Papua (including the islands of Cenderawasih Bay, as well as Adi Island and Liki Island), and all 238 Papuan languages spoken in West Papua).

For these 346 languages there are no articles or papers available that are dedicated to the study of rhetorical questions in these languages. There are, however, in-depth descriptions available for 37 of these languages, as far as the author could establish. Of these, 16 languages belong to the Austronesian language family, including the vehicular Malay languages, while 21 are Papuan languages. The descriptions for most of these languages, that is, for 26 of them, do not discuss rhetorical questions, though. This also includes five of the vehicular Malay varieties: Banda Malay (Paauw 2009), Kupang Malay (Paauw 2009; Steinhauer 1983), Larantuka Malay (Paauw 2009), Manado Malay (Stoel 2005), and North Moluccan / Ternate Malay (Litamahuputty 2012).

This leaves descriptions for only eleven of the 346 languages which discuss rhetorical questions. Most of them treat the topic only sparingly, however. That is, rather than discussing the topic in great detail, a few pertinent aspects of rhetorical questions are described, leaving major gaps and open questions concerning the form and functions of rhetorical questions in these languages. This, in turn, highlights that the topic is an understudied one. Moreover, this lack of descriptions renders the sample for this literature study into a convenience rather than a representative sample. Hence, the results are statistically not significant and therefore of only limited value to typological linguistics. The author submits, however, that the results may still be of value. As discussed below in more detail, they suggest a number of patterns which might be considered as testable hypotheses for future studies of rhetorical questions in Malayic languages, and/or in Austronesian and Papuan languages of West Papua.

The descriptions for eight of the eleven languages mention formal characteristics as well as functions of rhetorical questions: Abun (Berry and Berry 1999), Western Dani (Barclay 2008), Ambon Malay (van Minde 1997), Baba Malay (Lee 2014), Sri Lanka Malay (Nordhoff 2009), Moskona (Gravelle 2010), Mualang (Tjia 2007), and Una (Louwerse 1988). The description for Lower Grand Valley Dani (Bromley 1981) discusses their formal characteristics only. The remaining two descriptions only mention the functions of rhetorical questions: Auye (Moxness 2003, 2005), and Meyah (Gravelle 2004).

For the investigated eleven language descriptions, Table 5 gives an overview of the formal characteristics of rhetorical questions.

**Table 5:** *Formal characteristics of rhetorical questions*<sup>17</sup>

| Languages        | Lexical marker | Intonation pattern | None | Lexical marker (opt.) | ND |
|------------------|----------------|--------------------|------|-----------------------|----|
| Abun             |                |                    | x    |                       |    |
| Auye             |                |                    |      |                       | x  |
| Dani, LGV        |                |                    | x    |                       |    |
| Dani, Western    | x              |                    |      |                       |    |
| Malay, Ambon     |                |                    | x    |                       |    |
| Malay, Baba      | x              |                    |      |                       |    |
| Malay, Sri Lanka |                |                    |      | x                     |    |
| Meyah            |                |                    |      |                       | x  |
| Moskona          | x              | x                  |      |                       |    |
| Mualang          | x              | x                  |      |                       |    |
| Una              |                |                    | x    |                       |    |

As shown in Table 5, the descriptions for four of the eleven languages submit that rhetorical questions are formally marked with lexical markers. In addition, two of these languages also mark rhetorical questions with dedicated intonation patterns. Another four languages have no formal characteristics that differentiate rhetorical questions from non-rhetorical ones. For another language, that is, for Sri Lanka Malay, Nordhoff (2009) mentions optional lexical markers without clarifying, however, whether there are any other, obligatory, characteristics that uniquely mark rhetorical questions. For the remaining two languages, formal characteristics are not discussed at all, that is, for Auye (Moxness 2003, 2005) and Meyah (Gravelle 2004).

Table 6 gives an overview of the functions of rhetorical questions in the investigated eleven language descriptions.

**Table 6:** *Functions of rhetorical questions*<sup>18</sup>

| Languages        | Ass. (neg) | Ass. (pos) | Com. | Eval. (neg) | Incert. | D-mark. | ND  |
|------------------|------------|------------|------|-------------|---------|---------|-----|
| Abun             | x          |            | x    | x           | x       |         |     |
| Auye             |            |            |      |             |         |         | (x) |
| Dani, LGV        |            |            |      |             |         |         | x   |
| Dani, Western    | x          | x          |      |             | x       |         |     |
| Malay, Ambon     | x          |            |      | x           |         |         |     |
| Malay, Baba      | x          |            |      |             |         |         |     |
| Malay, Sri Lanka |            |            |      |             |         | x       |     |
| Meyah            |            | x          |      | x           |         |         |     |
| Moskona          |            |            |      | x           |         |         |     |
| Mualang          |            |            |      |             |         |         | (x) |
| Una              |            |            |      |             |         |         | (x) |

As summarized in Table 6, the descriptions for six of the eleven languages discuss the social functions of rhetorical questions, describing their uses as pseudo questions, namely, as assertions, commands, evaluations, and/or statements of incertitude. More specifically, five of these languages employ pseudo questions as assertions with four languages using them as negative assertions while only two languages use them to express positive assertions. Furthermore, four languages use rhetorical questions to communicate negative evaluations. The uses of rhetorical questions as statements of incertitude (two languages) or commands (one language) appear to be less common. The discourse-stimulating uses of rhetorical questions as stimulus questions are described for only one language. For three languages, that is, for Auye (Moxness 2003, 2005), Mualang (Tjia 2007), and Una (Louwerse 1988), the respective descriptions make only very general comments about the

<sup>17</sup> Abbreviations: Dani, LGV = Dani, Lower Grand Valley; opt. = optional; ND = not discussed.

<sup>18</sup> Abbreviations: Dani, LGV = Dani, Lower Grand Valley; Malay, SL = Malay, Sri Lanka; Ass. = assertion; Com. = command; Eval. = evaluation; D-mark = discourse marker; ND = not discussed.

functions of rhetorical questions (in Table 6 they are marked as “x” in the “not discussed” column). In addition, as already mentioned, the description for Lower Grand Valley Dani (Bromley 1981) does not discuss any functions of rhetorical questions.

The data presented in Table 6 are far from being comprehensive and representative. Two observations can be made, however. None of the examined descriptions intimates that rhetorical questions are used to communicate positive evaluations. Moreover, only one description treats any discourse-stimulating functions of rhetorical questions. Both observations could be due to gaps in the examined descriptions. Alternatively, however, one could argue that the respective descriptions would have mentioned such uses if they were major traits of rhetorical questions.

Hence, one testable hypothesis submitted here is that in Malayic languages as well as in West Papua’s Papuan languages rhetorical questions are not or only rarely used to make positive evaluations; instead, speakers rather use them to make negative evaluations. Another testable hypothesis is that the discourse-stimulating functions of rhetorical questions in these languages are marginal ones. At the very least, both hypotheses apply to Papuan Malay, as discussed in §3.

The language descriptions for the six languages that describe the social functions of rhetorical questions as pseudo questions do not explicitly mention the speaker’s underlying emotions. In discussing their social functions, however, the descriptions for six of these languages provide details that could be taken as indications of emotional undertones; the descriptions for the remaining five languages do not provide any emotion-related details.<sup>19</sup> The negative assertion in (43), repeated as (55), for example, expresses a rebuke in Ambon Malay (van Minde 1997: 270), suggesting underlying negative emotions. The expression of incertitude in (52), repeated as (56), communicates amazement in Western Dani (Barclay 2008: 505), pointing to underlying positive emotions. The expression of incertitude in (50), repeated as (57), conveys uncertainty in Abun (Berry and Berry 1999: 115), pointing to an emotionally uncharged or “undefined” attitude.

### Pseudo questions and underlying emotions

- (55) *sapa paksa se ambe doriang tu?!  
 who force 2SG take durian-fruit that  
 Ambon Malay: ‘who then would force you to take durian-fruits?!’ [Intended reading: ‘nobody would take durian-fruits!’] (van Minde 1997: 270)*
- (56) *iya! nonggop tongon yo- go agaarik kwe?  
 E<sub>AM</sub> how say PL CO.PR.they but  
 Western Dani: ‘it’s amazing!, what are they saying?’ (Barclay 2008: 505)*
- (57) *ye ne Yesugote ye Waropen bado?  
 person that Irianese person Waropen AQM  
 Abun: ‘was that Irianese person a Waropen person?’ (Berry and Berry 1999: 115)*

Table 7 gives an overview of the five languages for which their descriptions give some indications as to the speaker’s underlying emotions. All five descriptions intimate that the attested pseudo questions are accompanied by underlying negative emotions; the speakers employ these questions, for example, to rebuke or challenge their interlocutors or to express their disgust. The description for only language, as far as the author could establish, suggests that the speakers’ underlying emotions may also be positive; in the attested example, presented in (52) and repeated as (56), the speaker uses the pseudo question to convey amazement. For another language, the attested examples suggest that pseudo question may also be emotionally uncharged; that is, they do not seem to carry any emotional undertones (in Table 7, this category of underlying emotions is labelled as “undefined”).

<sup>19</sup> The description for Baba Malay (Lee 2014) does not provide any emotion-related details. In addition, as mentioned, the descriptions for Auye (Moxness 2003; 2005), Mualang (Tjia 2007), and Una (Louwerse 1988) make only very general comments concerning the functions of rhetorical questions; the description for Lower Grand Valley Dani (Bromley 1981) does not discuss any such functions.

**Table 7:** *Pseudo questions and underlying emotions*

| Languages     | Underlying emotions |          |           |
|---------------|---------------------|----------|-----------|
|               | Negative            | Positive | Undefined |
| Abun          | x                   |          | x         |
| Dani, Western | x                   | x        |           |
| Malay, Ambon  | x                   |          |           |
| Meyah         | x                   |          |           |
| Moskona       | x                   |          |           |

The data summarized Table 7 are also far from being representative and complete. Based on the rhetorical questions presented in the examined language descriptions, however, one observation can be made. It appears that pseudo questions are most commonly accompanied by underlying negative emotions. Again, this observation could be due to gaps in the consulted descriptions. One could also argue, however, that the respective authors would have mentioned it if underlying positive or “undefined” emotions were a major characteristic of pseudo questions. Hence, a third testable hypothesis is that in Malayic languages as well as in the Papuan languages of West Papua rhetorical questions are predominantly used to convey underlying negative emotions. Again, this hypothesis holds for Papuan Malay, as described in §3.

## 6 Summary

The focus of this paper was twofold, treating rhetorical questions from a descriptive as well as from a typological perspective. The first part described the form and functions of rhetorical questions in Papuan Malay. The second part focused on different typological aspects of rhetorical questions, based on a literature study of Malayic languages, as well as other Austronesian and Papuan languages in West Papua.

The descriptive part of this analysis of rhetorical questions shows that in Papuan Malay, as in other languages, rhetorical questions are very common. There are no formal, linguistic signals, however, that differentiate rhetorical questions from non-rhetorical ones. Instead, it is the context that indicates whether a question should be interpreted as a rhetorical question or an information-seeking, non-rhetorical one, and whether an identified rhetorical question has social functions as a pseudo question or discourse-stimulating functions as a stimulus question. For the present study this interpretation was based on the author’s intuition and experiences as a participant observer in a Papuan Malay speaking community, rather than on the intuitions of and corroboration by Papuan speakers of Papuan Malay. Along similar lines, the speaker’s tone of voice and other, nonverbal phenomena, such as laughter, together with the context, were taken as indications of the speakers’ underlying emotions.

Papuan Malay rhetorical questions are typically used as pseudo questions, having different social functions. The majority of them convey assertions, most of which are negative ones, followed by expressions of incertitude and negative evaluations. Most commonly, the speakers’ underlying emotions seem to be negative, while positive emotions appear to be rather rare. Likewise uncommon are pseudo questions that are emotionally uncharged and carry no noticeable emotional undertones. The discourse-stimulating function of rhetorical questions is a marginal one, with the attested stimulus questions having but one function, namely to introduce some new aspect regarding the topic under discussion.

The typological part of the present research examined to what extent the features of Papuan Malay rhetorical questions are, cross-linguistically, rather common or uncommon. An extensive literature study was conducted which included all 59 Malayic languages, as well as the 49 Austronesian and the 238 Papuan languages of West Papua. In-depth-descriptions are available for 37 of these languages, as far as the author could establish. For only eleven of these languages, however, the descriptions discuss rhetorical questions with most of them treating the topic only sparingly. This scarcity of descriptions highlights the fact that the topic of rhetorical questions is an understudied one.

The findings of this typological study suggest three patterns concerning the functions of rhetorical questions. While the data are far from being comprehensive, representative, and statistically significant, the findings might still be of value to typological linguistics. The first pattern indicates that in these languages rhetorical questions most commonly have social functions whereas their discourse-stimulating functions are marginal ones. The second pattern suggests that speakers do not use rhetorical questions to convey positive evaluations. The third pattern indicates that rhetorical questions predominantly carry underlying negative

emotions in these languages. As for the formal characteristics of rhetorical questions in these languages, no clear pattern emerges. In some of them, rhetorical questions are formally marked, while in others they are not formally differentiated from non-rhetorical ones, as in Papuan Malay.

The three patterns concerning the functions of rhetorical questions might be considered as testable hypotheses for further studies on rhetorical questions in other Malayic languages, and/or in the Austronesian and Papuan languages of West Papua. At the very least, all three patterns apply to Papuan Malay.

## 7 List of abbreviations

| Abbreviations   |                             |                 |   |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|---|
| 1, 2, 3         | 1st, 2nd, 3rd person        | L.PROX          | locative, proximal                        |
| AA              | anaphoric reference         | MASC            | masculine                                 |
| ACT             | active voice marker         | NEG             | negator                                   |
| AQM             | alternative question marker | NON.PAST        | non-past tense                            |
| CAUS            | causative                   | OB              | object                                    |
| CO              | continuous action           | PA2             | intermediate past tense                   |
| CONT.NEG        | contrastive negator         | PL              | plural                                    |
| D.DIST          | demonstrative, distal       | POSS            | possessive                                |
| D.PROX          | demonstrative, proximal     | PR              | present tense                             |
| DUR             | durative                    | PX              | prefix                                    |
| E <sub>AM</sub> | exclamation of amazement    | Q <sub>RA</sub> | rhetorical question                       |
| EMPH            | emphasis / emphatic         | RDP             | reduplicant                               |
| FQM             | final question marker       | REL             | relativizer                               |
| IN              | intensive mood              | SG              | singular                                  |
| INCL            | inclusive                   | SI <sub>D</sub> | different subject,<br>simultaneous action |
| INTERR          | interrogative               |                 |   |
| L.DIST          | locative, distal            |                 |   |

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